



## McDougall's Good Stories For Children



# How a Little Girl Who Was Rather Disposed to be a "Tom Boy" Did a Kind Deed for a Witch and Was Rewarded With a Pair of Red Stockings

WHEN Mabel Dalton disappeared from Ducktown, which is a village not far from Atlantic City, there was very little interest excited, but much speculation was aroused by the coming of a boy in the Dalton house, a boy of about the age of Mabel, who was recognized as Mr. Dalton's son and of whom he seemed very fond, as well as proud.

Nobody had ever seen a boy in the high-walled garden of the old Dalton house, but people supposed that he had been away at school all these years. When, however, Milton, for that was the boy's name, was asked questions as to where he had been living he merely smiled and said:

"Oh, I wasn't very far away." And, truly, he was so mysterious and secretive about his past that some persons with malicious venom hinted that he had been in the Reform School, for it was quite well known that his missing sister had been a bit of a tomboy, and Milton, they said, might have been, in the past, even worse. Nobody dared to ask any questions of Mr. Dalton, for he was too stern and dignified for anything of the sort.

After a time people forgot, in the stress of a busy summer season, to even think about anything but the summer visitors, from whom Ducktown derives a vast income, and only myself was interested in the boy who had so suddenly and mysteriously appeared in the gray house near the creek. Indeed, I grew more and more anxious to solve the problem, and finally I managed to gain the friendship and confidence of the boy himself, and found out just what had happened.

It was a wonderful story. When at last Milton consented to my writing it he was much older and had moved away from the village; and, therefore, it is safe to tell it.

Mabel was somewhat of a tomboy, yet she managed to restrain herself, for her father frowned upon every kind of unladylike action. She used to think that Mr. Dalton had always regretted that she was a girl, and did not love her half as much as he would have loved a boy, although a boy is ever so much more trouble to parents and not half as nice as a girl. So when she felt like climbing a tree, or throwing a stone through a pane of glass, or playing ball, or wading barefooted through the mud of the creek, she sat down and wrestled with the feeling until she had overcome it, for she knew how her father would frown when he heard of it.

All day long in the quiet garden behind its tall stone walls she played with dolls, embroidered pincushions on linen or read girls' books, while her heart was outside on the broad bay or among the laughing lads on the shore, who dived off high spires into the water with yells of demoniac glee.

When by accident a base-ball came flying over the wall, she hurled it back with a quick sense of the joy of being a boy.

Other girls went crabbing and sailing, but Mr. Dalton never permitted his daughter to indulge in such pleasures. She was a big girl, and strong; but she sometimes thought, with a sigh, that a girl confined to a garden and obliged to take music and painting lessons daily, would certainly soon have consumption and go into a decline. But when she asked her father for a pair of rubber boots, he merely laughed and asked her if she wished to go duck shooting on the meadows.

One bright summer morning, when the kingfishers were darting to and fro across the creek with shrill cries of delight, and the swallows, uttering short, sweet chirps, went skimming, in long, sweeping curves that just rippled the smooth water, up and down the bay, which here and there was ruffled by fish coming to the surface, while overhead a plover, cleaving the blue sky like an arrow, sent down a low, plaintive whistle, and a fish hawk sat on a post near the grassy edge watching the water which came almost to the very wall of the garden, because it was high tide, Mabel sat looking out toward the dim, blue shores of Pleasantville, far across the green meadows, and wishing that she was sailing in a little boat far, far into the misty distance.

Suddenly she observed a small boat drawn up on the shore beneath her, with its painter tied to the very gatepost as if left there for her use! As a matter of fact, it had been left there for only a few minutes, by young Henry Gertzen, while he ran up to the village to get his father's paper.

But Mabel, in her present mood, didn't reflect that the boat was in use; she only thought of the wonderful providence that had sent it to her just when she most wished for a sail! Had it been a very windy, or even a cloudy morning, the thought of using such a little toy boat would not have entered her mind, but the water was as smooth as a mirror and the sky like a great turquoise dome, without even one tiny cloud.

The wind rustled the leaves in the trees in the garden with a gentle and caressing touch that she knew was just enough to fill the small boat's sail and send her along, easily and softly, across the bay. Without reflecting farther she ran out of the gate, untied the rope, stepped into the boat and was away from the shore, and then rowing along with the tide. When Henry Gertzen returned, ten minutes later, she was around the bend and beyond Mike's Island, out of sight, and she was never again seen in Ducktown!

Now this is the story of what happened to her, and if you find that it is so wonderful as to seem

impossible, and therefore you can't believe it, remember that it is not my fault, but Milton Dalton's, for I relate it exactly as he told it to me.

Without knowing that she was leaving her girl life behind her for all time, Mabel rowed easily along, not far from shore, until she had rounded Mike's Island, opposite Fenton's boat-house, and was gliding over the glassy surface of Lake's Bay toward the Pleasantville shore, dim and hazily blue in the distance, and very romantic, too, suggesting fairyland and all manner of unreal things, although right near and impending was the real magic about to happen.

As she swung into the bay and skirted the other shore of the island, she saw across the water a little group of boys, who were wildly whooping and shrieking; and, with that instinct to join in all boyish sports that always possessed her, she turned the boat toward them. As she neared them she saw that they had driven a poor, skinny-looking cat up a tree and were inciting a couple of dogs to bark furiously at her, so that the poor cat was quite frantic with terror.

Now, Mabel didn't particularly like cats, but she abhorred all manner of cruelty. Beside, she had long ago taken a most violent dislike to these very boys (who were five brothers named Nagle), because they had often thrown snowballs at her and called her "fraid cat" when she had refused to steal out and play with them. Therefore, it was with a feeling of real joy that she rowed to them, and springing out of the boat ran to the tree, and, after giving each of the dogs a well placed kick, sternly scolded the cruel boys.

Her blue eyes flashed so sharply that they soon drew away from her, although they were five to one, and when they had gone she actually climbed that tree and brought down the terrified cat!

Hardly had she reached the ground than a door opened in a little nearby cottage and an old woman appeared, who called to her to bring the animal to her. Now, even Mabel, although confined so much to the house, knew that this old woman was supposed by every inhabitant of Ducktown to be a dreadful witch, who by a mere wink of the eye could bring all manner of evil upon those she hated; and had the Nagle boys even suspected that it was her cat which they had been teasing they would have hastened away at once.

Old Witch Hazel, as she was called, was now trembling, either with fear or rage, Mabel couldn't tell which, and when the cat was brought to her she seized it with shaking hands, after which she thanked the girl for saving its life.

"I wouldn't have lost poor old Amodeus for anything!" she declared. "He's my only comfort! And he's frightened so that his hair is turning gray, poor thing! You are a brave and kind girl, and if you'll step inside, I will reward you for your kind action."

"I need no reward!" cried Mabel. "Far be it from me to refuse to rescue a distressed animal; beside, it would have done me good to have slapped Jim Nagle's face, the big, fat coward; but he sneaked off before I got ready to do it!"

"Nevertheless, you shall be rewarded, and as I know the dearest wish of your heart, it shall be granted this day! Come in, please!" said the old witch, smiling. So Mabel entered.

Witch Hazel opened an old chest, and taking from it a pair of red silk stockings she gave them to the girl, saying:

"Take these and wear them in remembrance of me. They are all I have to give, but they are very fine stockings and just your size."

Without really thinking much of the gift Mabel took them and thanked the giver very politely, after which she ran back to the boat, being now rather anxious to get back home before her absence had been discovered by its owner, for she had been away an hour. But somehow she found, now that the tide was fully on the ebb, that it was not so easy to row, and soon she discovered that instead of getting

nearer to home she actually was being carried away from it pretty rapidly.

At last, when she was so tired and hot that her breath seemed leaving her, she thought of the sail and with some difficulty managed to raise and fasten it properly. Then, when the breeze belled its snowy surface and the boat began to move against the strong tide as if alive and anxious to return, she found that she had gotten so far out in the broad bay that the wind would only take her toward the Pleasantville shore.

By this time all the old tomboy spirit had departed and she was a timorous enough girl, although she certainly tried to be brave and confident; yet the thought of her father's stern face and his upturned lip, as he said something sharp and cutting about tomboys, made her hot and very much more nervous than she might have been. When she was well into "Hank's Thoroughfare," as it is called, she found that it really was but a pathway leading farther from home, and one so desolate and lonely that she was frightened, for if anything happened to the boat here there was no one to call to.

In the bay there were sailboats hastening thither and yon, but here even the very birds seemed to have deserted the reedy shores, the muddy banks of which now showed black and slimy, hiding the horizon so completely that now she had no idea of where she was! It was an awful situation for a girl, although every boy in Ducktown had it happen to him several times each day without noticing it at all.

Suddenly a shock awoke her from these dire reflections, a shock that dumped her upon the bottom of the boat, and then she realized that she had run her craft slam-bang upon a sand bar! Hard and fast it was, and the sail promptly swung over and hung flapping dolefully as she knelt there, staring after it at the rippling water rushing past.

Of course, no girl that lives near the water but knows that the tide rises and falls rapidly, and the very first thought that entered Mabel's head was the necessity of instantly getting that boat off



of that sandbar; so without wasting any time she took off her shoes and stockings and climbed overboard. Then the boat, lightened by her weight, was so easily pushed off that she laughed. Into it she climbed, and then looked about for her shoes and stockings, but, alas, her stockings had vanished! Something black showed a few yards away in the water, vanishing even as she looked, and then she remembered that she had hung them on the side of the boat.

"Perhaps," thought Mabel, "a shark seized them! But, at any rate, I still have the red silk ones, and I'll put them on!"

When she had her feet covered once more she looked about her. The boat, with its flapping sail had drifted so close to shore that its side was brushed by the overhanging reeds, and even tipping somewhat from their contact, which brought Mabel's heart into her mouth.

"My goodness! I wish I were a boy!" she cried, with honest indignation and hearty vigor. "It's a shame that a girl can't do things!"

The next minute a downward look turned into amazement! Her legs were covered with short blue trousers, she wore red silk stockings and her shoes were thick-soled and all scratched! She had warts on her tanned hands, as well as callous palms that defied a blister! The hands crept up to her head to find that her long brown hair had vanished and a crop of wiry stuff, that felt like a scrubbing-brush had taken its place, and her ears felt as though somebody had thrown sand into them! A little can set on her head. Her collarless shirt was open in front, and two buttons gone, and her jacket sleeve had a hole in it as large as her hand.

Even yet she had some of her girlhood in her soul, but it passed away like a mist, for at that instant a big green fly, one of the biting kind that every boy hates with all his soul, settled on the thwart with a buzz, and, instead of slapping at the insect, this new formed boy, that had been a girl but a moment before, promptly spat at it.

Then Mabel Dalton knew that she was no longer Mabel, and instantly decided to be called Milton while she played at being a boy, for, you see, she realized at once that it must be the gift of a witch that had made the change, and fully expected, of course, that she would wish herself a girl again at some time in the near future. No nice girl could, even if she would, do such an indecent act as spitting at a fly.

However, the fierce joy that filled her soul compensated for a slight hint of the indecency that somehow lingered for a short space, perhaps half a second, and then she forgot it. Then the new boy realized that his sail was flapping, and, jumping forward, drew in the sheet, and as the wind filled the sail he came about and began to tack out of Hank's Thoroughfare as if he had been sailing there all his life.

Then began Milton's existence, and that afternoon was for a long time a red letter day in his memory, for then he tasted all the sweets that a boy inherits by nature in all their fullness.

Then he made another discovery—a thing that a girl would scarcely have noticed. This was a locker under the stern, and in it he found a couple of fishing lines. About a half mile down the bay he saw a group of boats, and knowing that they were those of fishermen he resolved to borrow some bait and catch some fish. When he reached them he saw Mr. Alger, a friend of his father's, in one of them, and in two minutes he was catching sea bass as fast as he could pull them in, although no other boat near him was having any luck.

"That's the way it is," said Mr. Jacobs, one of the men in Mr. Alger's boat. "We come out here with a hundred dollars' worth of tackle and nine dollars worth of dry and wet bait, and we can't catch even a sea robin, but a kid with an old rusty hook and a rotten old line hauls them up as if he were bewitched!"

Having caught fifty or sixty fish the sport palled, and he sailed away to new adventures. Thus, tacking and free sailing, he came out into "Beach Thoroughfare," opposite a well-known sportsman's resort, where he had the incredible luck to find a clam-bake of enormous proportions in progress; and, with a boy's facility, ingratiated himself into the proprietor's confidence to such an extent that the man offered him a half-dollar to carry the plates and things from the hotel to the spot where the immense bake was slowly steaming and filling the afternoon air with a delicious, maddening fragrance, beside telling Milton that he could have all the clams and other viands he could eat.

Now, as perhaps you are aware, a clam-bake contains almost everything that is appetizing and good for one's interior department.

Did Milton eat anything? Well, when you realize, if you will stop to reflect, that all he had eaten was a peck of oysters, a watermelon, three sandwiches, two peaches and an egg since morning, you will, of course, see that he was nearly starved, and that he had plenty of room for a real meal. Even Mr. Herold, the clam-bake artist, said that he never met with such real, genuine appreciation of his efforts! Milton accounted for two lobsters, twenty or thirty clams, half a chicken, three crabs, several sweet potatoes and two pieces of pie, so you may realize that he was a boy, all right!

Nightfall was nearing, the water wore a pearly, soft and dreamy opal hue, when he finally thought of going home. Across the bay herons winged a lazy flight into a bed of reedy gold that concealed the setting sun. Slow moving craft floated along with the rising tide, for the wind had sunk to rest; but he sprang into his boat, and, pulling a swift, sturdy stroke, set out for a long row up the thoroughfare.

When he neared the house and the walls of the garden came into view, a funny feeling took possession of him as he thought of his father's stern face, and then he resolved to meet him just as he was, without wishing himself a girl again, just to see what Mr. Dalton would say to the metaphor-phosis, which is a long word, meaning "to change," and one that I've been waiting for a chance of using for many a day! So, when the boat grated on the pebbly beach he leaped out smiling, only to be confronted by Henry Gertzen, who at once hurled angry words and threats at him for stealing the boat. From such a spindle-shanked, cross-eyed kid as Henry, Milton would take no such language, and he told him so.

In the splendid mix-up that followed it is just to state that Henry got in a few choice wallops that left sore spots for three days on Milton's head and face, but when the affair was concluded, or, rather, brought to a stop by Mr. Dalton's sudden appearance, Henry looked like a boy who had been up against a runaway automobile and had tried to stop it with his countenance! Both eyes were black, his lips swelled and his nose twisted! Mr. Dalton separated them, and Henry, having such a good excuse, got into his boat and slowly rowed away.

Then Milton followed his father into the house, much to Mr. Dalton's surprise, but you may imagine what he felt when the boy calmly told him who he was. At first he wouldn't believe it, but when Milton related a great number of facts known only to themselves, and even offered to change into a girl right before his father's eyes, Mr. Dalton became convinced, and said:

"No, There's no use taking chances! It evidently worked once all right, but it might not work again. You just take off those red stockings and hand them to me and I'll take care of them!"

What do you suppose he did with them? He opened the kitchen range, and, after poking them in with the stove-lifter, closed the lid! They made an awful smell as they burned, and I suppose that was the magic in them sizzling out, and pretty soon they were cinders, while Milton stood there with joy in his heart, for he knew that he would be a boy for the rest of his life.

"A thing of beauty is a boy forever!" he cried as the last trace of the red stockings left the air, and he followed his father into the dining room, for supper was even then on the table.

And now he tells me that his father is a different man from the one he knew as a girl. He goes out crabbing and fishing, bought Milton a gun and a boat, and is now talking of getting an automobile so that they can get about easier, for he's out for all manner of fun, is Mr. Dalton. Milton is as fond of him as any man could wish, and when Mr. Dalton speaks of his boy the look of pride in his eyes would delight you.

And he was so grateful to the old witch that he built her a nice little house, where she is now living, and I am making goo-goo eyes at her myself, for there's a certain thing I wish to ask her for. That is a gasoline engine that can't break down, or act up, or sputter, or shoot, or thump, and nothing but a real witch can get such a wonder!

WALT McDUGALL.

